Split Second Worksheet

1. Describe the *stasis* in the play: where, when, who, what, etc. in a paragraph.

Split Second was written in 1981 but is set in the “present” in Manhattan, New York. It revolves around black police officer Val Johnson and the aftermath of his shooting (and killing) a white car thief. The play also introduces some of Val’s coworkers, his father, and his wife.

2. What is the *intrusion*?

I would say the intrusion occurs in the first scene when Val shoots Willis after he repeatedly insults Val for his skin color.

3. What is the *unique factor*?

“Today is the day…” Val Johnson decided to pursue Willis about the stolen car.

4. What is the *dramatic question* that should be answered by the end of the play?

Will Val ever reveal the full truth of what happened between he and Willis?

5. Provide an illustration of the *two kinds of exposition* that the play has in it.

Known to one: Val shot Willis out of rage!

Known to all: Val and his ex-cop father are estranged. This provides much of the grounds for discussion and “family angst."

6. Identify the most *theatrical moment* in the play and of what importance it seems to be.

I think the first scene would have to be the most theatrical because it escalates so quickly. Willis gets caught, he tries to bribe Val, then proceeds to insult him terribly. In response then, Val shoots and kills Willis. This scene would involve quick motions and very strong language.

7. List some of the *themes* of the play.

* Racial stereotyping
* “The family business” with both Val and his father being cops
* How stress causes you to become a new person
* When is it appropriate to lie?

8. What do the principal characters *want* and what are some *obstacles* that stand in the way of them getting what they want?

Val wants his conscience to be clear, but the fact that he has killed a white man and told many different versions of the story makes him restless and uneasy. Alea wants Rusty to support and reassure his son, but Rusty does the exact opposite, telling Val to turn himself in “like a decent cop would do.” She also wants life with her husband to go back to normal, but it never will because Val comes out of this trial severely altered.

9. Describe some possible *images* in the play and how does the *title* help us understand the play.

The fact that Val is in street clothes, not his uniform, could be an image for the lack of respect he receives. He is a fully trained cop, but when Willis sees him, he is out of uniform, not as commanding, and he probably was more likely to make fun of Val. Willis’ pocket knife could be seen as Val’s “responsibility.” Responsibility might not be the most clear word, but the idea is that Val was holding the knife when he shot Willis, then he placed it in Willis’ hand and “have over his responsibility” for the murder to his rage.

The title, Split Second, gives a great first introduction to the play because it clues the audience into the fact that something is going to happen very quickly that alters the characters’ lives forever. In less than a second, Val’s rage takes over, and he shoots Willis for his obscene comments.

10. Briefly define the *family relationships* that are examined in the play.

Perhaps most strongly, we see the tense relationship between Val and his father, Rusty. Rusty was a cop, and he believes his son should tell the truth and turn himself in. He fails to give his son solid emotional support or thoughtful advice - he only further discourages Val. Audiences also witness Val and his wife’s relationship throughout the course of the play. Alea just wants things to go back to normal, and she pushes her husband to lie, saying Willis came at him with the knife so she can have her old life back.